

Brief program notes for a graduate saxophone recital: compositions by William Albright,
Benjamín Gutiérrez, François Borne, and Andy Scott

by

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Introduction

This Master's Report presents extended program notes on four works representing diverse stylistic and historical perspectives within the alto saxophone repertoire. The pieces addressed are as follows: *Three Letter Word* by Andy Scott, *Fantaisie Brillante sur des airs de "Carmen"* by François Borne, *Rapsodia for Alto Saxophone and Orchestra* by Benjamín Gutiérrez, and *Sonata for Alto Saxophone and Piano* by William Albright. The document provides biographical background for each composer and delves into the contexts in which these compositions were created.

Each chapter includes a discussion of the biography of the composer, general information about the piece, formal and stylistic design considerations, and interpretative performance considerations. The performance-related considerations addressed include technical demands, expressive challenges, phrasing, and saxophone interaction with piano. The observations are grounded in the study of the scores and supported by the practical preparation of the works for performance.

This report aims to serve as a performance-oriented resource for advanced saxophonists. The goal is to support informed performance decisions and highlight the artistic and technical diversity of the modern and traditional saxophone repertoire.

Sonata for Alto Saxophone and Piano - William Albright

William Albright was born in Gary, Indiana, in 1944. He was an American composer, organist, and pianist, and he studied at the Juilliard School, the University of Michigan, and the Paris Conservatoire. His teachers were Ross Lee Finney, George Rochberg, and Olivier Messiaen. In 1970, Albright joined the composition faculty of the University of Michigan, where he served as Associate Director of the Electronic Music Studio. During his career, he was awarded the Queen Marie-José Prize and two other awards from the Koussevitzky Foundation. Albright's compositional style explores complex rhythms, atonality, ragtime, jazz, and non-Western musical influences. His music is highly intricate in both its technical demands and its sonic beauty. A highly active organist, he expanded the contemporary repertoire for organ and piano. Albright passed away in 1998.¹

The *Sonata for Alto Saxophone and Piano* was composed in 1984 as the result of a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts. The grant included the commissioning of three pieces for saxophone and piano by the following three saxophone-piano duos: Laura Hunter/Brian Connell, Donald Sinta/Ellen Weckler, and Joseph Wytko/Walter Cosand.² The *Sonata for Alto Saxophone and Piano* by William Albright was premiered by the Wytko/Cosand Duo at Carnegie Hall in New York City.³ Albright's *Sonata* is considered a most important core piece within the saxophone literature, and is routinely performed at conferences and on student

¹ Daniel Gillespie, "Albright, William," *Grove Music Online*, 2001, <https://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/grovemusic/view/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.001.0001/omo-9781561592630-e-0000000482>

² Albright, William. *Composer's Notes to Sonata for Alto Saxophone and Piano*. New York: Henmar Press Inc., 1990.

³ Anna Marie Wytko, conversation with the author, Kansas State University, Manhattan, Kansas, November 18, 2025.

and professional level recitals.⁴ The piece is comprised of four movements: I. *Two-Part Invention*, II. *La Follia nuova: a lament for George Cacioppo*, III. *Scherzo “Will o’ the wisp,”* and IV. *Recitative and Mad Dance*.

Albright utilizes musical language that composers did not commonly practice until the twentieth century. *Two-Part Invention* has a title that suggests strong harmonic and melodic counterpoint inspired by the writing of Bach; however, it contains material that, at first glance, sounds aleatory and unrelated.⁵ *La Follia nuova* is dedicated to George Caccioppo, a close friend of Albright, co-founder of the ONCE group, and mentor of two generations of composers. Caccioppo died unexpectedly on April 8, 1984.⁶ Albright utilizes a combination of tonality and atonality throughout this movement, which is based upon a chaconne. The calm, delicate, and quiet sections of music provide opportunities for the saxophonist to explore the use of side key fingerings. Albright also utilizes the altissimo register of the saxophone in both intricate and dense musical textures.⁷

The *Scherzo* presents significant technical demands for both performers. In addition to the brilliant tempo, the music is composed primarily of sixteenth-note passages presented at very soft dynamic levels. There is very little opportunity for rest due to the continuous flow of sixteenth notes between the saxophonist and pianist. Albright continues his exploration of extreme register changes in both the piano part and the saxophone part.⁸ The fourth movement opens with a saxophone *Recitative* that leads into a rondo dance built upon a persistent

⁴ Brian R. Utley, *William Albright’s Sonata for Alto Saxophone and Piano: Analytical Insights and Performance Considerations* (Doctoral dissertation, University of Kentucky, 2001), ProQuest One Academic, 5.

⁵ Gavin Murphy, *Dedications: Scholarly Program Notes for Sebeop-inspired/lected Saxophone Works* (Master’s research paper, Southern Illinois University, 2013), OpenSIUC, https://opensiuc.lib.siu.edu/gs_rp/386/.

⁶ Albright, William. *Composer’s Notes to Sonata for Alto Saxophone and Piano*. New York: Henmar Press Inc., 1990.

⁷ Brian R. Utley, *William Albright’s Sonata for Alto Saxophone and Piano: Analytical Insights and Performance Considerations* (Doctoral dissertation, University of Kentucky, 2001), ProQuest One Academic, 24.

⁸ Utley, *William Albright’s Sonata*, 37.

minor-third motive and bebop-inspired material. The *Mad Dance* recalls the juxtaposition of lyrical phrases against angular material from the energetic *Two-Part Invention*.⁹ The final portion of the piece “pushes the boundaries” of technical and expressive demands for both performers. This includes passages of music with highly rapid articulation and the use of slap tongue for the saxophonist and stopped strings for the pianist.

Some of the interpretative considerations in William Albright’s *Sonata* are the drastic and immediate changes in articulation and dynamics that are evident from the opening of the first movement. The saxophonist must demonstrate a high level of tonal control by not only routinely shifting expressive intentions, but also doing so rapidly and frequently. The large intervallic leaps appear frequently throughout this movement, and they require solid command of fingerings and hand placement in order to avoid any technical awkwardness that may lead to imprecision. These demands are combined with the use of the altissimo register in the cadenzas found throughout the work, such as the abrupt and agile leaps between the altissimo and the middle register of the saxophone. There are multiple situations in which the use of the left-side keys (LSK) is preferable to conventional long tube middle-register D, D#, and E fingerings, as they contribute to a more homogeneous sound in soft dynamics and better tuning (less sharp). The second and third movements provide clear examples of these tools. Throughout the piece, and in contrast to conventional tonal practice, Albright allows and demands the exploration of less orthodox sound concepts to enrich the musical discourse with new timbral colors. This is especially evident in the fourth movement, where expressive indications such as “*strident, honky,*” “*angrier,*” “*violent,*” “*secco,*” and “*with abandon*” require risky stylistic exploration by the performer. It is

⁹ Brian R. Uteley, *William Albright’s Sonata for Alto Saxophone and Piano: Analytical Insights and Performance Considerations* (Doctoral dissertation, University of Kentucky, 2001), ProQuest One Academic, 51-52.

most important to note that it is the saxophonist's responsibility not to sacrifice proper tuning when exploring these expressive indications.

Rapsodia para saxofón alto y orquesta - Benjamín Gutiérrez

Benjamín Gutiérrez was born in San José, Costa Rica, in 1937. He is widely considered a leading figure among composers from Costa Rica. His music has been played frequently by the National Symphony Orchestra of Costa Rica and has had a significant impact on concert music throughout the country.¹⁰ Gutiérrez began teaching in 1954 and co-founded the School of Music at the University of Costa Rica in 1963, where he served as its first director.¹¹ He was awarded the honorific title Meritorious Professor of the University of Costa Rica in 1986.¹² Gutiérrez studied at the Conservatorio Nacional de Música in Guatemala, the New England Conservatory, and at the University of Michigan under Ross Lee Finney. He also studied with Darius Milhaud and Alberto Ginastera for brief periods of time.¹³

Gutiérrez's *Rapsodia* for alto saxophone and orchestra is dedicated to the Costa Rican saxophonist Norman Calderón. It was the first major concert piece written for saxophone in the history of the country.¹⁴ The work represents a transcription of his *Concerto for Clarinet*, which was composed in 1959. This piece is the first concerto ever written by Gutiérrez.¹⁵ When the version for clarinet was premiered in Costa Rica in 1961, it was performed by Epifanio

¹⁰ Javier Valerio and others, quoted in Gabriel Sánchez Porras, *An Album of Costa Rican Concert Pieces for Saxophone* (Doctoral dissertation, University of Iowa, 2023), 30.

¹¹ Nosara Vargas Gamboa, *Brief Program Notes for a Saxophone Lecture Recital: Compositions by Benjamín Gutiérrez, Fernande Decruck, Karel Husa and Robert Muczynski* (Master's report, Kansas State University, 2021), K-State Research Exchange (K-REx), 1.

¹² Orquídea María Guandique Araniva, *Critical Study of Benjamín Gutiérrez's Viola Concerto Sobre un Canto Bribri* (DMA diss., University of Arizona, 2012), 23.

¹³ Gabriel Sánchez Porras, *An album*, 30.

¹⁴ Javier Valerio, *The Emergence and Development of Classical Saxophone Repertoire in Costa Rica* (DMA diss., University of Kansas, 2013), ProQuest Dissertations & Theses, 4.

¹⁵ Ekaterina Chatski, "Rutas para explorar los elementos estilísticos del lenguaje musical de un compositor," in *Música académica costarricense: Del presente al pasado cercano* (San José, Costa Rica: Universidad de Costa Rica, Facultad de Bellas Artes, 2012), 91.

Sánchez.¹⁶ The composition is dedicated to clarinetist Sherman Friedland, whom Gutiérrez met while studying at the New England Conservatory in Boston.¹⁷

The first movement of the piece contains a distinctive musical approach and character. This movement features a rich harmonic texture of polytonality. The music revolves around tonal centers and recognizable, traditional V-I cadential motions. Rhythmic contrast and spirit contribute to the energy and complexity of the music. The composer creates rhythmic tension by juxtaposing duple rhythmic groupings against triple rhythmic groupings. The second movement adopts a calmer, more introspective character and is built upon twelve-tone technique. There is a musical conversation that occurs between the saxophone and piano. The third and final movement, which is the most substantial of the three, incorporates melodic and harmonic material inspired by J.S. Bach's *Concerto No. 1 in D Minor, BWV 1052*. Baroque in character, Gutiérrez describes this movement as an "homage to tonal music."¹⁸

Interpretively, Benjamín Gutiérrez's *Rapsodia* requires the saxophonist to shift musical languages with flexibility and awareness of the contrasting styles presented throughout the three movements. The first movement demands a strong sense of rhythmic and harmonic direction, and the performer must articulate phrases clearly within the polytonal context. It is important for the saxophonist to be aware of the various tonal centers and to highlight cadential motions when they occur. In order for the saxophonist to play the passages where duple and triple groupings interact, the interpreter needs a clear understanding of rhythm and clear familiarity with the piano part. During the second movement, the interpretive focus shifts towards musical intimacy, during which the saxophonist must shape lines with sensitivity, while the twelve-tone material

¹⁶Gabriel Sánchez Porras, *An album*, 31.

¹⁷ Juan Pablo Andrade, *Costa Rican Composer Benjamín Gutiérrez and His Piano Works* (DMA diss., University of North Carolina at Greensboro, 2008).

¹⁸ Javier Valerio, *The Emergence and Development of Classical Saxophone Repertoire in Costa Rica* (DMA diss., University of Kansas, 2013), ProQuest Dissertations & Thesesunfolds.

unfolds as a dialogue between saxophone and piano. The final movement represents a dramatic change in character and embraces Gutierrez's tribute to the music of Bach, and, in particular, Bach's use of fugue.

Fantaisie Brillante “Carmen” pour Saxophone Alto et Piano - François Borne

François Borne was born in France in 1840. He was a composer and professor at the Conservatoire de Toulouse, and a flutist with the orchestra of the Bordeaux Opera House. In the Romantic and post-Romantic periods, the flute repertoire acquired significant growth thanks to virtuoso flutist-composers, including Borne. Musicians of the time were looking for new pieces of music featuring harmonic and rhythmic originality in addition to technical brilliance and expression. George Bizet, the composer of the famous opera *Carmen*, was born in 1838. He composed *Carmen* in 1874, and the opera was premiered in Paris in March 1875. *Carmen* serves as the inspiration behind Borne’s *Fantaisie*.¹⁹

Fantaisie Brillante sur des airs de “Carmen” for Alto Saxophone et Piano is a transcription of the original version for flute, which was composed in 1900.²⁰ Borne dedicated this piece to his dear friend J. Leybach. This transcription for saxophone has become a standard transcription in the saxophone repertoire; however, there is no specific date or place indicated regarding when or where the saxophone version of the piece was premiered.

François Borne highlights in his composition some of the most recognizable musical numbers from within Georges Bizet’s opera *Carmen*, such as the *Habanera*, *Seguidilla*, and *Chanson de Bohème*. All of them originate from the opéra-comique tradition of showcasing closed musical forms with highly memorable melodies. *Habanera* is the heart of Borne’s piece. It is a lively traditional Spanish dance that Carmen performs with castanets and playful charm within the story of the opera. Borne evolves this melody into a series of variations that consistently end triumphantly. This is in contrast to the tragic, fatal conclusion of Bizet’s opera.

¹⁹ Rossella Marisi, “From Opera to Operatic Arrangements: François Borne’s *Fantaisie Brillante sur Carmen*” (paper presented at the European Studies Conference, University of Nebraska at Omaha, October 2012).

²⁰ François Borne, *Fantaisie Brillante sur des Airs de Carmen pour Saxophone Alto et Piano*, eds. Iwan Roth and Raymond Meylan (Switzerland: Edition Kunzelmann GmbH, n.d.).

Borne blends his understanding of the saxophone's potential for virtuosity throughout his composition while also appreciating the passionate colors from within the opera.²¹

When discussing interpretative considerations from within this composition, it is notable to mention that Borne oscillates between thematic material that is calm and lyrical in nature and thematic material that is bold and virtuosic in nature. These expressive changes create the rhapsodic character of the piece. Playing at a slower tempo does not mean that there is less difficulty. The slower sections clearly expose the saxophonist's musical maturity and depth of expression. Throughout this composition, the variations each represent a distinct personality while maintaining the melodic integrity of each theme. It is true that technical facility and velocity are expected elements from within this work, but the saxophonist must remain conscientious of not sacrificing musicality in favor of speed. He must make thoughtful interpretive choices that always serve the music. As the opera *Carmen* is the inspiration behind this piece, it is of the utmost importance for the saxophonist to study the opera in order to gain a clear and sensitive understanding of the work's melodies and various musical elements.

²¹ Utah Symphony, "*Borne – Fantasie Brillante on Themes from Bizet's Carmen*," last modified November 2015, <https://utahsymphony.org/explore/2015/11/borne-fantasie-brillante-on-themes-from-bizet-s-carmen/>

Three Letter Word - Andy Scott

Andy Scott was born in Bournemouth, England, in 1966. He is a multi-nominated, award-winning composer and winner of the prestigious BASCA British Composer Award. His musical language is recognized worldwide as virtuosic, emotionally deep, and highly collaborative.²² Scott's music is extensively commissioned, with works premiered at major international venues such as Carnegie Hall and Wigmore Hall.²³ He teaches composition and saxophone at the Royal Northern College of Music and leads workshops, masterclasses, and large-scale creative projects around the world.²⁴ He is published by Astute Music and is an endorsee of Selmer Paris and Vandoren.²⁵

Scott's *Three Letter Word* is dedicated to the memory of Esbjorn Svensson, Swedish composer and pianist, who was tragically killed in a diving accident on June 14, 2008 at 44 years of age. The title of the piece emerged from a series of coincidences involving names and concepts represented with three-letter abbreviations. This includes Esbjorn Svensson's Trio, the commissioning body, and the performers for whom the work was written. Most significantly, the title resonates with the familiar three-letter phrase "rest in peace." The piece was commissioned by the Park Lane Group and premiered by Huw Wiggin and Timothy Abel as part of the PLG Young Artists New Year Series at the Purcell Room in Southbank Centre, London, on January 14, 2010.²⁶

²² Andy Scott, "About," Andy Scott – Composer & Sthree-lettercommissionedaxophonist, accessed November 19, 2025, <https://www.andyscott.org.uk/about.html>

²³ Astute Music, "Andy Scott Catalogue," accessed November 19, 2025, https://www.astute-music.com/store/c108/Andy_Scott.html

²⁴ Royal Northern College of Music, "Andy Scott," accessed November 19, 2025, <https://www.rncm.ac.uk/people/andy-scott/>

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Andy Scott, *Three Letter Word: for Alto Saxophone and Piano* (Sandbach, Cheshire, UK: Astute Music Ltd., 2011), am104-48, first page.

Throughout this composition, Scott draws on two contrasting sonic ideas. The first idea has a flexible, almost improvisatory character, with fast, expressive saxophone passages supported by a piano texture built upon a four-note tremolo. The second idea centers upon a repeating two-measure rhythmic pattern in the piano that serves as a foundation for the saxophone to present catchy, melodic ideas. These musical elements reappear throughout the concluding section. There is a hidden element within the piece which is a brief quotation from *Dolores in a Shoestand* on E.S.T's album *Tuesday Wonderland*, from 2006.²⁷

The interpretive considerations for Scott's *Three Letter Word* are varied and revolve around the work's demanding tempo and technical intensity. One of the most prominent challenges is the extensive use of stepwise motion combined with arpeggiated figures that require the saxophonist to move smoothly from the low register into the altissimo register without sacrificing tone or altissimo harmonics. There is a great demand for precise control of air speed and volume in the fast, slurred passages. This includes extreme intervallic leaps, such as the transition from altissimo B ♭ to low B ♭, as shown in measure number 8. These elements are exposed in the opening section of the piece. The saxophone's interactions with the piano in the piece become more technically and musically interactive as the work progresses. The harmonic language is not very complex. On the other hand, there are multiple changes when it comes to time signatures, which can challenge the performer's rhythmic perception, intuition, and ensemble coordination. The saxophonist must have acquired a high level of fluency in triads and arpeggios, as these patterns are present throughout the piece and become increasingly more demanding at faster tempos. This is evident from measure 113 to the end, in which fast rhythms and accelerandos intensify the technical demands. A great and helpful task for the saxophonist is

²⁷ Andy Scott, *Three Letter Word*: for Alto Saxophone and Piano (Sandbach, Cheshire, UK: Astute Music Ltd., 2011), am104-48, first page.

to memorize the arpeggiated patterns as a result of practice. Finally, it is indispensable for the saxophonist to have gained confident control of the altissimo register, as it is frequently used within the fast passages that push the performer's limits on the instrument.

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